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SUBJECT: TURKEY: ABBAS VISIT MUCH BETTER THAN EXPECTED

REF: ANKARA 1012

Classified By: Ambassador James F. Jeffrey for reasons 1.4 (b,c)

¶1. (C) Summary: GOT leadership maintained a positive and constructive tone during Palestinian Authority (PA) President Abbas' July 8-10 Ankara visit despite previous concerns surrounding Abbas, recent Cyprus trip and past pro-Hamas GOT rhetoric. Erdogan and Abbas discussed USG regional policy, expressing support for President Obama's rapprochement efforts and insistence on a two-state solution. He reportedly demonstrated a surprisingly measured tone when discussing intra-Palestinian issues and did not press Abbas to reach out to Hamas. Instead, both Erdogan and Gul spend a significant amount of time providing a historical justification for Turkish actions in northern Cyprus (and a between-the-lines warning not to take a side in the long standing dispute). Erdogan argued that had Turkey not invaded in 1974, the Turkish Cypriots would be in a worse position today than the Palestinians. Overall, we are pleased with the constructive tone of the meetings and hope the approach on the Palestinians signals the beginning of a more rational, less emotion-driven GOT approach to regional policy. End Summary.

¶2. (C) PLO Ambassador Nabil Maarouf told Ambassador, July 22, that PA President Abbas' visit was excellent and successful. PM Erdogan, FM Davutoglu, Abbas, and Maarouf primarily discussed regional politics during their July 9 closed-door 1 1 session. Maarouf reported Erdogan and Abbas approved of President Obama's regional initiatives, specifically vocal USG support for a two-state solution and U.S. efforts to engage Syria. Erdogan provided a brief overview of U.S.-Syrian rapprochement, including Syria-Iraq-U.S. counterterrorism cooperation initiatives. Davutoglu added that the purpose of his and Erdogan's July 22 trip to Damascus was to discuss the Israel-Syria indirect talks and "hinted" at the fact he would meet with Hamas. On Iran, Erdogan said the U.S. is focused on reaching an agreement with the GOI on the peaceful use of nuclear energy to the exclusion of military weapons.

¶3. (C) Maarouf reported that both sides are critical of the Israeli administration. Erdogan opined that Netanyahu may be trying to force the USG to view Iran as top priority over the Middle East peace process by not creating an opportunity for progress. Nevertheless, Netanyahu is feeling a lot of pressure from the Obama administration. Erdogan and Davutoglu offered a much more tempered, constructive tone than expected on the Palestinian issue, reported Maarouf. Erdogan began by simply stating "The situation in Palestine is hurting us." Unlike in previous meetings, neither Erdogan nor Davutoglu pressured Abbas to do anything regarding Hamas. He added that Turkey is talking to the U.S. and European capitals to identify a constructive approach to the

humanitarian crisis because "Something has to be done in Gaza." Maarouf welcomed this change of tone as good news, adding it was beyond his expectations. He attributed this loss of enthusiasm for Hamas to one of three reasons: 1) U.S. pressure on the GOT to temper its favor for Hamas; 2) the lack of desired results from Hamas; and/or 3) a realization that if Hamas is to make political concessions, it would be to Egypt not Turkey.

¶4. (C) Abbas underscored the importance of not delaying the Palestinian presidential and government elections in January 2010. Maarouf commented that Davutoglu expressed support for holding earlier elections -- a stark contrast to Hamas' call for postponement. Erdogan offered additional economic assistance to the PA. Beyond the USD 150 million already pledged, Erdogan promised USD 50 million, with a separate USD 10 million earmarked for the PA budget. He also expressed interest in working with the PA on health, education, water, and other projects, adding "If you need anything else, we are here."

¶5. (C) Prior to Abbas' arrival, Maarouf said that he had met with FM Davutoglu to clarify sensationalist press reports that Abbas had sided with Cyprus over Turkey during his trip to Nicosia. Maarouf reported that Abbas had only stated that the PA supported Cypriot participation in the OIC and commented on similar views regarding the Middle East peace process; nothing was said about Turkey. In the 11 meeting, Erdogan admitted that he did not believe press reports, but underscored "This is Cyprus." If we did not do what we did in 1974, he stated, the Turkish Cypriots would be worse off today than the Palestinians. Given all his support for

ANKARA 00001056 002 OF 002

Palestine, the press reports had made him look weak in front of the Turkish people. Abbas responded that he had visited Cyprus to meet with the 2,500 Palestinian diaspora residing on the island -- the same reason he had visited northern Iraq. Erdogan encouraged Abbas to open an Embassy in the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" (TRNC) or allow the "TRNC" to have representation in Ramallah. He added that Turkey is ready to receive 200 Palestinian families (roughly 1,000 of the 3,000 Palestinians located on the border between Iraq and Syria) and provide them with housing and employment in Trakya.

¶6. (C) President Gul echoed the same regional themes during his July 10 meeting with Abbas. Like Erdogan, Gul spent a significant amount of time elaborating on Turkish sensitivities regarding Cyprus and delving further into the conflict's history. He underscored that Cyprus is an issue that Turkey takes very seriously. During a private conversation, Maarouf reported that he and Abbas had discussed possible appeasements for Ankara such as opening cultural center in "TRNC" to service 500 Palestinian students studying on the northern part of Cyprus.

¶7. (C) Comment: The MFA's Under Secretary designate Sinirlioglu told Ambassador before our meeting that the Abbas talks has gone well, and it turns out he was right. The GOT leadership's constructive tone with Abbas certainly is a welcome change to the heated pro-Hamas rhetoric of earlier this year that Maarouf predicted would dominate the talks (reftel). This greatly reflects an evolving understanding of the implications of their actions and a desire not to be isolated because of them. Although the absence of discussion on Hamas may partially be contributed to Ankara's single-minded focus on Cyprus (and Erdogan's desire not to allow the opposition to gain the upper hand), we are optimistic that Turkey will adopt a more neutral position in the future when dealing with the Palestinians.

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